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MINISTER STRAHL ANNOUNCES THAT ROYAL ASSENT GIVEN TO LEGISLATION EXTENDING HUMAN RIGHTS PROTECTIONS TO ALL FIRST NATIONS

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Ottawa (June 19, 2008) - The Honourable Chuck Strahl, Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, with Patrick Brazeau, National Chief of the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, today announced that legislation extending fundamental human rights protections to all First Nations communities has received Royal Assent.

"Passage of Bill C-21, An Act to amend the *Human Rights Act* marks a significant turning point in the relationship between First Nations and the Government of Canada," says Minister Strahl. "It underscores this government's strong commitment to protecting the human rights of all Canadians."

"First Nations citizens governed by the *Indian Act* have waited thirty years for this simple yet significant accommodation," said Patrick Brazeau, National Chief of the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples. "We view it as another constructive, meaningful step on the road to recognizing and responding to the real needs of Canada's First Nations citizens, both on- and off-reserve. First Nations citizens can now finally enjoy the same protection of their human rights as all other Canadians have had available to them for the past thirty years."

Repealing section 67 of the *Canadian Human Rights Act* is the culmination of a concerted effort by the federal government to bring an end to a legislative gap that has left many individuals, mainly those living on reserves, without full legal access to the Act.

The Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC) has hailed the repeal of s. 67, and has announced its commitment to work in close collaboration with First Nations organizations and the Government of Canada to design and build a human rights system that reflects and respects Aboriginal peoples' cultures and traditional laws.

Bill C-21 was reinstated and deemed referred to the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development on November 13, 2007, where a number of amendments were made in response to testimony heard from witnesses representing a broad variety of interests.

The bill as amended in the House of Commons and passed by the Senate includes a three year transition period for application of the repeal to First Nation governments, a non-derogation and interpretive clause and the requirement of a joint study to be undertaken by the federal government with representatives of First Nations during the transition period to prepare for implementation. *Application of the Act* is immediate to the federal government.

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